

Using the Pragmatic Progressive Philosophy in Adult Education

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Abstract

Using a pragmatic approach of progressive philosophy when educating adult learners utilizes the knowledge of history, to connect reality with current experiences through facilitated learning.

Long, argues that there are two kinds of pragmatic value with the history of knowledge; a sense of history helps in the development of principles that extend beyond mere impressions of current facts, " and it enhances practice" by suggesting what has worked or not worked, in practice before, why it did or did not work, and options or alternatives for consideration. Another pragmatic education by helping educators" recognize {the} past in the present form" (Long, 1990).

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is an attempt to show how adult education that uses a pragmatic progressive philosophy encompasses adult experiences, relationships, impacts behavior, humanistic, and radical approaches that create ways of developing and empowering adult learning in and outside of the classroom environment. The philosophical basis of progressivism is pragmatism a distinctively American philosophy that goes back to the 1870s. Dewey described the inductive scientific method in his classic, *How We Think* (1910). Pragmatism accepts both the relativism and pluralism of worldviews. This attitude is most in keeping with nature of human beings and the evolving world (Elias & Merriam, (2005)).

Connecting Adult Experiences to Learning

My description of adult education is, persons that are seeking an education for the purpose of outcomes that will lead to improving their employment, increasing skills or to broaden their lifelong learning of societal changes. There are numerous purposes and goals that adults set when the decision to continue their education has been identified. As Thomas (1991a) explains: Clearly education must be concerned with specific learning outcomes and with the processes of learning needed for students to achieve those outcomes (Thomas, 1991a).

The experiences that each individual adult brings to the classroom are valid and important to their educational experience. The opportunity to listen and learn from the different experiences that are injected in to class discussion can be viewed as ways that increase knowledge and bring an individual change of attitude and interpretation toward a common problem or situation.

One shares in what another has thought and felt and in so far, meagerly or amply, has his own attitude modified. The experience has to be formulated in order to be communicated. To formulate, requires getting outside of it, seeing as another would see it, considering what points of contact it has with the life of another, so that it maybe got into such form that he can appreciate its meaning (Dewey, 2004).

My experience inside the adult education classroom has shifted my feelings from all knowledge comes from the authoritarian method of educator instruction to knowledge can be obtained through self-directed learning and participation of discussion with peers instead of dictated by the educator. Facilitators engage learners in class discussions that allow views to be spoken and addressed. The outcome of the discussions may not be clear but the process has been effective in ways that have left me with a feeling of empowerment as an individual contributor to class topics. I feel that the learner should leave the classroom feeling that their input into discussions are heard and are relevant to the topic.

The method of self directed learning impacts ways of motivating class participants to draw from their previous experiences while providing supporting facts that identify and provide an understanding of why they feel experience helped form their belief. Experience is central to an understanding of the adult learner. However, it is not the mere accumulation of experience that matters; instead, the way which individuals make meaning of their experience facilitates growth and learning (Merriam and Brockett, 2007).

It is important for the educator to create a curriculum that reflects the class description. The curriculum has to be flexible and beneficial to a culturally diverse classroom environment. The curriculum should be diverse enough that it allows growth, individuality, creativity and critical thinking.

Because the adult classroom, like any classroom, is situated within systems of power (such as class, race, and gender), these cultural dynamics shape learners' educational experiences and the ways in which they see and interpret their world. The recommendation for curriculum developers is to incorporate the cultural knowledge of adult learners so as not to marginalize them from the subject matter and thus to foster a more inclusive, democratic learning environment (Kubow,2009).

Educators should continuously find ways to improve their learning environment and curriculum for the diverse population of students. It is also important for the teacher and student to build a connection; this opens the opportunity to learn about the students cultural identity and behaviors. In turn the student will also learn about the teachers cultural identity along with a better understanding of the pragmatic progressive approach used to teach adult education.

Building Relationships

One of the most important building blocks of education is the ability to build relationships. A facilitator has to acquire the ability to find ways to relate to different personalities and backgrounds within the classroom to successfully facilitate learning.

A productive working relationship helps the instructor convey expectations and feedback, facilitates effective communication, and allows

adults to express their expectations, questions, concerns, and developmental needs. A transformative process occurs when adults believe that they have an active role in the learning process. These positive interactions are also likely to help adults feel connected to the class, which in turn can build a sense of community (Johnson, 2010, para. 2).

I found that when I am comfortable within the classroom environment learning is easier and my desire to learn more is heightened. My experience-teaching adults made me conscious of how a learner's surroundings affect their learning and growth. Adult learners are not quick to reveal information about them until they are comfortable with the person or group in which he/she is involved with. The personality of the adult learner has a lot to do with their behavior in class discussion and whether they are willing to listen to opposing arguments that may result in disagreeing with their philosophy. I believe that a person's behavior is a result of past experiences that left a lasting effect.

Watson in a famous experiment with an eleven-month old child successfully conditioned the boy to fear a white rat. Watson argued that emotional responses together with motor reflexes could be conditioned to evoke reflexes. All behavior from the fear response of the rat to the most complex activity of the adult could be explained in terms of conditioning (Elias and Merriam, 2005).

The adult educator can attempt to work through this behavior by acknowledging it without intimidation to the student, by making a display of their response or lack of response to a topic or subject. I believe that the adult learner and educator are accountable for the learning experience. When a student leaves a classroom they should

leave with something that they can carry away and use at a later date. I believe that it is the educator's responsibility to ensure that the student displays some type of understanding of the subject matter during and at the end of the class session. Reflection assignments are a good way to determine if a student has learned anything in the class in addition to the change in behavior toward class participation.

The student on the other hand is responsible for his/her learning experience. Participation and willingness to be open-minded listen and participate in class assignments and discussions are relevant to the learning process.

How Education Impacts Behavior

Adult education does not only impact learner behaviors in the classroom it also impacts the behavior on the job and their performance. Companies should place employee development before profits, in order to ensure their employees are able to perform their work assignments efficiently. Implementing professional development and adult continuing education classes is a way to change employee behavior and improve morale. These types of behavior changes will show a positive impact to performance and profit margins for corporations.

Human resource development is usually directed to implement developmental education programs that will increase organizational goals in departments that have been identified as low producing, due to a deficiency in employee performance. Company executives see the majority of employee education and training as necessary to carrying out company goals. As in other areas of education, accountability is an important facet of corporate programs (Elias and Merriam, 2005).

The use of historical data and employee input are used as a reference point to show where and why there is a deficiency and what benefits a developmental program will have on organizational performance measurements before it is implemented.

Subsystem performance measures are central to performance improvement research: it is impossible to implement research or discuss performance improvement from an organizational perspective without some form of measurement (Torraco, 1999).

My experience as an employee support manager working with organizational performance, I have learned that the input received from experienced employees provides valid reasons as to why the numbers are at a downward spiral. Employee input normally identifies lack of education in areas of the job and lack of management support to provide up to date training as the cause for low performance. This is where employees and HRD come together to assess and evaluate the problem in order to implement an educational development tool that will help to improve performance. Education is a pivotal attribute to employee performance and the ability to educate adults with information that is conducive to their livelihood would be accepted favorably.

Humanistic Approach

When I think of the word human I think of, a breathing, warm, spiritual and mystical individual that comes with a unique personality of their own. The word humanism in my opinion is the ability to relate to a situation with a holistic approach. The educator should have the ability to learn from their students and value their opinions when it is different from their own.

The humanistic approach in adult education helps the learner to think and develop as an individual. I may not speak eloquently or have an expanded vocabulary but I have a

spirit that reaches out to others and in my opinion this is a top contributor to my learning experience. The goal of learning is to become fully human, a perfect person does not necessarily have to master eloquence but must have good ethics. It is this kind of learning that Confucius himself promoted (Cho, 1999).

To be humanistic is a large contributor to the ability of building relationships with students and employees. The ability to build a relationship between the educator and student helps to support the learning process. The student wants to know that the educator has an interest in the experiences that they can contribute to their classroom learning. The acknowledgement of the educator affects the faith and confidence of the student and their ability to learn.

Radical Ways to Approach Social Justice

The ability to think about a situation before accepting another point of view is critical to learning. To have your own thoughts and to think outside of the norm helps to expand the growth of the individual. Self directed radical learning in adult education provides the learner with the skills to raise questions and discuss social events and take action if necessary. I believe that radical and critical adult education has helped to make changes to social injustices. Past political events have showed that radical approaches made an impact on our social justice system.

For instance, the 1968 Olympics in Mexico, where two Black track athletes raised their fist to show Black Power when accepting their medals. This was a radical move that caused a disruption for White America, but was interpreted by Black America as a brave move to make, about the unjust treatment of Blacks in America. The Mexico Olympics of 1968 saw African-American protests reach a worldwide audience when two

black athletes used a medal ceremony for the 200 meters to protest about the lack of real civil rights in America (http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/Mexico_1968.htm).

Conclusion

Adult education is lifelong learning that is intended to equip adult learners with the skills and competencies that will impact economic development and social progress. There is not one philosophy that can be used to approach every situation. The circumstance influences the philosophical approach that is used.

In the practice of adult education it must be recognized that persons can be rather flexible in their philosophical approaches. One's philosophy may be shaped by the context within which one is working (Elias and Merriam, 2005).

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